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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TALLINN 000276

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DEPT FOR EUR/NB - VICTORIA MIDDLETON, KEITH ANDERTON, AND JAMES LOVELL

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SUBJECT: ESTONIA'S BRONZE SOLDIER: EXCAVATION BEGINS

REF: A) GOLDSTEIN-MIDDLETON EMAIL 26APR07 B) TALLINN

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Classified By: CDA Jeff Goldstein for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. After nearly a year of controversy, and weeks of speculation that the Estonian government would finally remove the city's WWII-era Soldier and any war graves found nearby, the process has begun. The GOE has extensively briefed the press, the ethnic Russian community the diplomatic corps, and the Tallinn City Council, but still faces the prospect of legal challenges from the city, and demonstrations by activists coming from both outside and inside the country. The government is sensitive to the possible escalation of tensions with Russia over this move, but determined to press forward with excavation of the site. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Between 4:30 and 6:00 on the morning of April 26, the Government of Estonia (GOE) erected a security fence around the Bronze Soldier and the park in which it is located. This is the GOE's first step in its plan to remove and relocate the Bronze Soldier and any war graves that may be buried near it to a military cemetery nearby. The erection of the security fence took place without any major incidents, but Estonian Security Police (KAPO) interlocutors informed us that due to public rallies already forming around the statue, they are planning to lengthen the security fence perimeter. Several TV crews and representatives from Russian-minority interest groups were present from the moment the police erected the fence.

¶3. (SBU) Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) interlocutors have informed us that excavations of the war graves will begin next week, and will probably last at least until the middle of May. As a result of the excavation, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip announced that it will not be possible for people to leave flowers at the monument on May 9, Victory Day. MFA Director General Simmo Tiik told foreign Ambassador's resident in Tallinn that those who wished to do so could leave flowers at the military cemetery, and pointed out that many had done so in the past, including representatives of the Russian embassy. Tiik emphasized that Estonia has discussed this issue with the Russian government for a year now, but that the Russians had refused to cooperate. He stressed, however, that the Estonians have offered the Russian embassy an opportunity to observe the excavation work and that Estonian forensic experts will ask Russia for any help they may need to identify the remains buried at the site.

¶ 4. (C) For weeks leading up to today's events, Russia has been waging an active propaganda campaign against the removal of the Bronze Soldier. On April 25, Estonia's paper of record, Postimees, released a story naming two Russian diplomats whom KAPO accused of fomenting and organizing groups of young Russian-speakers to protest. Andreas Kaju, Advisor to Defense Minister Jaak Aaviksoo, told us off-the-record that Foreign Minister Urmas Paet "gave KAPO the green light to embarrass the Russians." Kaju dismissed the two Russian diplomats as being "reckless and foolish." The Estonians have assured us they have no plans whatsoever to PNG the Russians. According to Kaju, what concerns the GOE more deeply was the recent admission by Minister of Internal Affairs, Juri Pihl, in an internal cabinet meeting that Estonian intelligence estimates that up to as many as 400 Russian nationals may have entered Estonia in the last couple of weeks to agitate the situation. Kaju said that KAPO was working hard to find the agitators they know to be in the country and deport them as quickly as they can.

¶ 5. (C) MOD interlocutors have said that the next 24 to 48 hours will be critical for the GOE to show that it is in control of the situation. Extra police from all over the country have been brought in, and have already been stationed around the park. Yesterday, Prime Minister Ansip gave a long interview on local Russian-language radio to explain the government's position, and today Defense Minister Aaviksoo will meet with a roundtable representing 30 different social organizations interested in the issue, including major Russian groups. The Constitution Party, the largest Russian party in Estonia, has stated it will avoid any extra-legal activities, but the more radical "Night Watch" has said that, while it opposes violence, any

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violence that now occurs will be the government's fault. The MOD's Kaju told us he was concerned by a KAPO report that Russian-speaking groups were planning to bus in Russian-speaking school children from northeastern Estonia to Tallinn to join the protests. If true, Kaju was concerned that Moscow would use images of Estonian police facing off against school children for its "anti-Estonia PR purposes."

¶ 6. (C) Our GOE interlocutors have regularly stressed with us that the Bronze Soldier's removal is purely an internal matter being done in accordance with Estonian and international law. Our MOD, MFA, and KAPO interlocutors all assured us that unless the Supreme Court rules against the GOE in a pending legal challenge to the Law on War Graves the statue will be moved.

¶ 7. (C) Comment: Even though PM Ansip and FM Paet's Reform party has been the principal driver behind the removal of the Bronze Soldier, GOE interlocutors have shared with us that Moscow's provocative behavior has started to create a sense of solidarity in the Cabinet. Moreover, with the erection of the security fence, GOE interlocutors have told us that any back-down would be disastrous for the GOE, leaving no party unscathed. End Comment.

GOLDSTEIN